



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Fact Sheet

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Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 Section 203: Technology Task Force

On August 7, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146) ("Choice Act"). Technical revisions to the Choice Act were made on September 26, 2014, when the President signed into law the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-175). Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) goal continues to be to provide timely, high-quality health care for Veterans. VA's focus and priority is on timely and effective implementation of this highly complex piece of legislation.

Section 203, requires VA to review, through the use of a Technology Task Force, the needs of VA with respect to the appointment scheduling system and software.

Background

In order to comprehensively examine VA's ability to deliver high-quality health care to Veterans, Section 203 calls for VA to enter into an agreement with an independent Technology Task Force. The Technology Task Force will review new scheduling system options and business processes, which meet VA's scheduling needs. The Technology Task Force will propose specific actions VA can take to improve its scheduling system, and determine whether any existing off-the-shelf system would meet VA's needs.

Task Force Details

The Choice Act prohibits the use of Federal funds to assist the Technology Task Force in carrying out the review. On September 11, 2014, VA signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Northern Virginia Technology Council (NVTC) to establish this Technology Task Force.

Timeline

The Technology Task Force will share recommendations for improvements with Congress and the Secretary within 45 days of enactment of the law. Within 30 days of receiving the recommendations, the Secretary must publish the report in the Federal Register and on a public VA website. Any recommendations from the Technology Task Force that the Secretary considers feasible, advisable, and cost effective must be implemented within one year.

Assessment

On October 30, 2014, NVTC submitted its assessment of VA's appointment scheduling to the Secretary and Congress. The report includes 39 recommendations grouped into

four domains – people, process, technology, and performance measurement. The report's findings and recommendations were largely informed by onsite observations at two VA Medical Centers (Richmond and Hampton Roads). In addition, VA also provided NVTC with access to a library of scheduling related information. The majority of the findings in the report are consistent with what the VA has identified as areas of improvement, and in numerous cases the VA has already started to implement mitigation strategies. On November 26, VA published the report to the Federal Register and on a public website (www.va.gov/opa/choiceact) as required by law.

Scheduling Solutions

In addition to the collaborating with the Technology Task Force, VA is taking several immediate and short-term steps to improve the current system while taking steps to acquire and deploy a new scheduling system. VA is releasing 11 code patches to resolve data quality issues in the existing system, and has recently awarded a contract to improve the existing scheduling interface which will begin deploying in January, 2015. Additionally, VA is in the process of developing an application to allow Veterans to directly request certain types of appointments. In August, 2014, VA issued a Performance Work Statement for a new Medical Appointment Scheduling System to maximize industry and stakeholder input. By the end of the calendar year 2014, VA will issue a formal Request for Proposals, with an anticipated contract award to follow. The Medical Appointment Scheduling Solution will be delivered over the next two years to all VA Medical Centers in six month increments.